

ATFA Succeeds by Involving and Empowering Alabamians

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Alabama TREASURE Forest Association chapter activities encourage people to become involved in their local county because they offer many opportunities to meet and interact with others who are interested in forest natural resource conservation. The ATFA statewide membership has increased more than 164 percent during the past 18 months as chapters bring in more and more people who enjoy the activities and find a connection to our TREASURE Forest family.

Participants at ATFA meetings have a variety of interests and receive value in many different forms. Some seek to increase their knowledge of how to manage their forestland; others take advantage of the opportunity to meet new people who share the same interests and challenges.

The ATFA promotes participation by helping to establish and facilitate programs that benefit ATFA county chapters. We recognize the importance of empowering people with a knowledge of the value of our natural resources and the impact they have on the quality of life for every Alabamian. These programs are designed to provide educational and social avenues to attract and involve more people.

Programs Involve Many

The “Neighbors Helping Neighbors” Leadership Training Sessions are encouraging and empowering a network of people who are motivated to build and sustain grass roots ATFA chapters in all Alabama counties. More than half of Alabama counties have already formed ATFA chapters and are holding meetings. Many more counties are in different stages of chapter formation. This growth has come in part as a direct result of people who became excited about the ATFA and about helping their neighbors.

One of the most successful programs is “Beyond Becoming an Outdoors

Woman.” The B-BOW program is designed to give women the opportunity for hands-on instruction and experience that instills confidence in a variety of outdoor recreational activities. This program has been conducted in Mobile, Conecuh, Tallapoosa, and Washington counties and several more counties are planning B-Bow Events in the spring of 2001.



The “Classroom in the Forest: Forest in the Classroom,” which is an expansion of our celebrated Adopt-A-School Program, was very successful in Mobile County during its pilot project last year. This program is now being expanded to Montgomery, Jefferson, Madison, and Mobile counties. The program carries an important message about the value of our forest natural resources and the role that private landowners play in the sustainability of those resources in Alabama. “Classroom in the Forest” seeks to empower teams of landowner, stakeholder and agency representatives to go into the classroom and present a series of lessons and activities. Then the presenters follow up by taking school students on a tour of a TREASURE Forest in the weeks that follow.

Another program that has proven beneficial to ATFA chapters is the “Charter Night Celebration.” The pilot for this program proved to be very successful in Pike County where it was used as a catalyst for membership growth. The result was a 300 percent increase in membership. The Pike County Charter Night Celebration also attracted numerous financial supporters from the community and increased public awareness of the chapter.

We encourage our leaders to conduct their programs with a spirit of cooperation designed to foster communication and build relationships among landowners, non-landowners and agency representatives. We seek to promote a positive outlook for discussion and acknowledge our responsibility to be good stewards of the land. Our knowledge, our values, and our management of Alabama’s forest natural resources are all things we must share with our neighbors.

Summary

All over this country people talk about a general dissatisfaction with the environment and public policy. This suggests that there are possibly millions who have become disconnected from the very land upon which this country was founded. The ATFA is working toward building and restoring those connections between people who are neighbors and the land that has nourished this nation to greatness.

We must train our children and educate the general public so they recognize the value of forest natural resources to our environment and our economy. We must instill in everyone an appreciation for landowners and private land ownership to ensure that our rights as Alabamians and Americans are never diminished or eroded. We must “stay the course” that we have chosen to lead Alabama down the road to forest sustainability. 🌲